

## Information for Internationally Educated Nurses: Becoming a Licensed Nurse in the U.S.

### FACTS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU WORK AS A NURSE IN THE U.S.:

- ☒ All registered (RN) and licensed practical or vocational (LPN/VN) nurses who work in the U.S. must have a nursing license in the state(s) where they will work. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) has 60 state and territorial member boards of nursing that issue nursing licenses to both RNs and LPN/VNs who work in their state.
- ☒ The U.S. Federal government is the authority regarding immigration issues, not the states and territories. Nurses who want to work in the U.S. will need to obtain the proper work visa(s) before they will be allowed to move. For help with this process, please contact the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at: [http://uscis.gov/graphics/how-doi/Health\\_Cert.htm](http://uscis.gov/graphics/how-doi/Health_Cert.htm).

- ☒ There are two types of licensure to become familiar with:

1. *Licensure by NCLEX®.* Candidate applies for initial licensure in a U.S. state or territory and takes and passes the NCLEX nursing exam. The NCLEX-RN is the nurse licensure examination given for licensure as an RN. The NCLEX-PN is the licensure examination given for licensure as an LPN.
2. *Licensure by Endorsement.* Used after a nurse has passed NCLEX and has at least one U.S.

state or territorial nursing license, and applies to another state for a nursing license.

### STEPS TO OBTAIN YOUR FIRST NURSE LICENSE IN A STATE OR TERRITORY:

- 1) Contact the board of nursing in the state where you will work as a nurse. Information on how to contact the boards of nursing can be found at: [www.ncsbn.org](http://www.ncsbn.org).
- 2) Inform the board of nursing that you were educated outside the U.S. and ask the board to send you an application to apply for a license by examination. Request an application specific to your qualifications for licensure as an RN or an LPN. The board of nursing in the state where you intend to work is the

best place to get information about your eligibility to become a licensed RN or LPN/VN.

- 3) In addition, ask the board of nursing about any other requirements needed for licensure in the state. States may request official copies of your education transcripts, criminal background checks or passage of specific English language proficiency examinations. Discuss with the board of nursing their individual requirements regarding the English proficiency examinations that they will accept, and the passing scores needed to be issued a nursing license in that state.

- 4) General licensure requirements include proof that you:

- Have comparable nursing education
- Safely practiced nursing in home country
- Proof that you passed an approved test that demonstrates that you can read, write, speak and understand the English language (if you were not educated in English).
- Passage of the NCLEX examination
- Application fee

Also, many boards of nursing require a CGFNS Certificate, CGFNS Credentials Evaluation Service or in some cases a *VisaScreen*™ certificate, before they will issue a nursing license. In some cases, candidates must have one of these certificates prior to being allowed to take the NCLEX examination. Information regarding obtaining a CGFNS Certificate can be found at [www.cgfns.org](http://www.cgfns.org). Additionally, some states perform their own credentials review or utilize other services for credential review services, please check with the individual state board of nursing for their requirements.

- 5) The licensure application will include information on how to register and take the NCLEX examination. Remember, the registration materials and NCLEX are only given in English. Follow the registration instructions. Contact the board of nursing or the testing department at NCSBN for assistance (e-mail [nclexinfo@ncsbn.org](mailto:nclexinfo@ncsbn.org) for assistance). Requirements may vary from state to state regarding eligibility to take the NCLEX, so please visit the board of nursing Web site or contact them with questions. Candidates should only apply to one state at a time to take the NCLEX.

- 6) Remember to ask for a copy of the Nursing Practice Act in the state in which you are licensed to practice nursing. It contains the state's regulations and all nurses are accountable to practice according to those regulations.

- 7) After licensure, read the paperwork carefully to see if there are additional requirements. Some states issue temporary permits, and therefore may require additional information, including a U.S. Social Security Number, to finalize your nursing license. Requirements and procedures vary, so it is important to be in contact with the board and to know when you can legally begin work as a nurse in the U.S.

- 8) Nurses should also be familiar with renewal procedures so you always remain current and legally authorized to practice. If you should move to practice in another state, repeat some of these steps to inquire about 'endorsing' (obtaining another license in a different state or territory).